

(For Release Thursday a.m., Jan. 2, 1947)

Dec. 30, 1946

Hon. Mortimer R. Proctor
Governor of Vermont
State House
Montpelier, Vermont

Dear Governor Proctor:

The State Board of Public Welfare has completed a thorough and detailed investigation concerning the policy and workings of Weeks School administration. This investigation has involved interviewing of both children and staff members during five all-day sessions at the Weeks School and several informal visits and inspections by various members of the board. It has also involved careful consideration of recommendations made in previous studies of the school, including Roy McLaughlin's recent investigation and policies established by the former Weeks School Advisory Board. The Welfare Board, feeling its responsibility to put the facts before the people of the state, has in every way endeavored to maintain an impartial attitude and to draw conclusions based entirely on facts.

The basic conclusion reached by the board is that fundamentally Weeks School is being properly administered and that the superintendent and assistant superintendent have done commendably well in solving the many problems posed by an institution comprising a group which includes both boys and girls, both children of nine years and young men and women of twenty, both children with a high level of mentality and children who rightfully belong in Brandon State School. The difficulties of adjusting a program to these many different types are manifold and the complexity of the problems are such that only a deep interest in the welfare of the group would motivate men to devote their lives to this type of work. The board wishes particularly to call attention to the recommendation made in the "Over-all Survey" of July 1, 1946, which reads as follows: "That the Women's Reformatory at Rutland be converted into a training school for older boys and that a new women's reformatory be constructed."

Upon careful analysis of the situation, some points were revealed which the board felt should be improved upon and recommendations have been made to that effect. One fact which the board feels can not be emphasized too strongly is that our investigation reveals that only a very small percentage of the total enrollment of the school who are extremely incorrigible are involved in the episodes which led to the recent charges against the school. Staff members involved in discipline irregularities are, likewise, a very small percentage compared to the majority of staff members who are doing a good and conscientious job. During our investigation, many staff members were interviewed. One member has, upon the recommendation of the board, been discharged from the institution. Another staff member resigned and left the institution before our investigation was completed.

The charges brought forth by Father William Cain, Director of Vermont Catholic Charities, and the conclusions reached by the committee representing the Veterans of Foreign Wars, who spent a couple of days at the institution, will be covered in our report, which follows.

ISOLATION
Isolation has been used at Weeks School for the following purposes: (a) Quarantine at entrance; (b) Quarantine after runaway; (c) Protection of the group; (d) Punishment for incorrigibility. The practice of isolating new entrants for quarantine seems unavoidable. Isolation for punishment is used only after counselling and other forms of punishment have failed. The board has found that isolation was extended in a few cases to more than two weeks and that there have

been one or two instances in which a three week period has been used. These were exceptional cases.

In connection with Father Cain's charge that a boy was pummeled while in solitary confinement, the board, after having interviewed staff members and the boys concerned, find that the "On the Spot" punishment was of undue severity and, upon the recommendation of the board, the staff member responsible for this incident has been discharged.

With reference to isolation practices at the school, the board recommends:

- 1- That a variety of reading material shall be provided to boys in isolation.
- 2- That slack suits (which have already been ordered for this purpose) shall be provided to boys in isolation.
- 3- That for all cases isolated for disciplinary purposes for periods greater than 7 days, a report and case history shall be submitted to the Commissioner of Public Welfare, as soon as the period of confinement exceeds 7 days. (The board feels that it is not feasible to put an arbitrary limit on isolation until such time as some arrangements can be made to remove the older and extremely incorrigible boys from this institution.)
- 4- That all boys in isolation shall be visited daily by some staff member for purposes of counselling and that records shall be kept of such visits.

"ON THE SPOT" CORRECTION

After interviewing many people and considering all angles of the question, the board is unanimous in its opinion that "on the spot" punishment is necessary. There are impertinent, obstinate and unruly boys, with whom at times counselling or command is not effective. Slapping with the open hand is the only permitted form of "on the spot" correction. When such punishment is administered, a written report to the superintendent is required. Such report must specify time, names, occasion and description of punishment administered.

A new staff member is likely to be confronted, and usually is, with an exceptional number of disciplinary occasions. This is due to the tendency of boys to try out a new man to see how far they can go with him. If the staff member is a good disciplinarian, he has to administer slapping much less frequently after the first few weeks of his testing. During our investigation, we interviewed one staff member who had been accused of using his fists. Before our investigation was completed, he left the institution.

SPANKINGS

One or both of the administrative heads of the institution are always present at a spanking, which is punishment administered for boys for whom all other methods of correction have been ineffective. The usual procedure is to have the boy, fully clothed, lean over and grasp a bench while ten strokes of a strap are administered by the coach, with ten second intervals between strokes counted by the assistant superintendent, while the superintendent counts the strokes and orders cessation of punishment. Regarding the charge that an excessive number of strokes have been frequently administered in spankings, your board finds that by rule of the school ten strokes are the maximum punishment inflicted. Substitute strokes may be added for strokes actually dodged. The superintendent, assistant superintendent, and coach, who administer the spankings state that these rules have not been deviated from in administering duly authorized spankings. The board has found no evidence which would lead them to doubt this statement, nor has any evidence been found of boys being required to run around to restore circulation after being spanked. These statements are substantiated by the testimony of boys to whom spankings were administered.

The charge that black eyes have resulted from punishment either regularly or irregularly administered is not proven so far as the evidence that we have been able to gather would indicate and we have thoroughly investigated this charge.

LOCKER ROOM PUNISHMENT

The phrase "on line" is a hangover from earlier days and practices long discontinued. It has recently been erroneously used to designate requiring boys to sit quietly in the locker room with hands on knees. It should be understood that the lockers used by the boys are large enough to sit in comfortably and are open on one side, the open side facing toward the center of the recreation room. This punishment, which does not exceed a maximum of three hours a day has sometimes involved a three hour stretch at a time, although this is not ordinarily the case. This form of discipline can not reasonably be called "cruel and inhuman" unless it is applied for excessively long periods or with undue frequency. A question has been raised regarding the justice of punishing a cottage for the delinquency of a single boy. Such vicarious punishment may appear to the casual observer to be uncalled for but it is a sound general principle that good citizens assist in preventing infractions of the law.

With reference to locker room punishment, the board makes the following recommendations:

- 1-That ordinarily not more than a two hour maximum be imposed per day on any boy.
- 2- That in cottages where there have been requirements of somewhat rigid posture, sitting with hands on knees, the requirement of rigidity be relaxed in the interests of more natural posture.
- 3- That boys be allowed reading material while sitting on locker if they so desire.

COLD PACK

The charge that cold pack was used as punishment derives from the testimony of a young girl so emotionally unbalanced that she was transferred to the State Hospital at Waterbury for observation. Her testimony involved great exaggeration regarding the number of cold packs administered. It should be noted that this treatment, as applied, is medical treatment, not punishment, and that it had been recommended by a psychiatrist and application made with two other physicians concurring. Your board does not presume to oppose its judgment to that of these professional men. Far from questioning the utility of such treatments, we not that the cold pack is one of the generally recognized treatments for highly excited and disturbed cases (Note: "Hydrotherapy in Psychiatric Hospitals" by Rebekah Wright, M.D., Chapter 12). With reference to cold pack, the board recommends:

1. That this type of treatment be administered only in the hospital of the institution.

ALLEGED DENIAL OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

It has been alleged that one boy was denied the privilege of going on into high school last fall. The boy in question was interviewed at length by the board. It was found that this boy had had extreme difficulty in completing the eighth grade and had expressed no interest in attending high school until a month after school had started. At that time he was instructed that he would have to make up certain school work before he could enter high school with his class. The boy, of his own volition, chose not to do this but, rather, to continue his vocational training in the garage and repair shop at Weeks School, the job he is still on. Another boy at the same time was given the same opportunity of making up work and then entering high school. This boy took advantage of the opportunity and is now attending high school and doing well in his work.

with regard to the criticism of educational facilities at Weeks School in that a fourth year of high school is not provided, the board would point out that this matter is taken care of by Vermont Public Laws, Section 4290, which reads as follows: "The board of education shall pay from funds at its disposal for the high school instruction of state wards at the Weeks School". Many boys and girls have taken advantage of this law and have graduated from Vergennes High School.

GIRLS' PUNISHMENT

The VFW committee refers to the use of a girls' punishment room. Your board found, upon investigation, that at one time three girls were returned from escape and vented their anger by smashing the doors, windows and furniture of their respective rooms, causing about \$50.00 worth of damage to property. At that time, metal was put on the inside of the doors and wire on the windows of certain rooms to insure against a repetition of this breakage. The girls are put in these rooms when they have tantrums. It should be further noted that when a girl is highly excited and violent, furniture or loose equipment is a definite hazard.

The board found that under present conditions the practice of locking some girls' rooms at night seems necessary, first for the moral protection of other girls and secondly, to prevent contemplated escape. Your board would, however, recommend:

- 1-That an electrical locking device be installed immediately, which would permit releasing all locked doors by the pressing of a single button in case of fire.

RECREATION

The board feels that the dormitory basement where the children spend their free time is unsuited as a recreation room and that, because of this unsuitable space, many disciplinary problems arise which make it difficult for both children and staff members. Your board, therefore, recommends:

- 1- That appropriations for the school be increased to allow for the proper furnishing and equipping of these rooms to make them more attractive and useful to the children.

Your board also feels that the recreation program in effect at the school is not broad enough to provide adequate recreation for evenings, Sundays and holidays. We, therefore, recommend:

- 1-That the superintendent of the school, together with a committee of his staff members, prepare and submit to the board plans for a more extensive recreational program.
- 2- That sufficient funds be provided to build at least two bowling alleys and two shuffleboard courts in existing buildings so as to provide more diversion in the over-all recreation program.

CHAPLAINS

A lack of cooperation has been evident between chaplains and staff members. We recognize the confidential relation of the chaplains to the children but would recommend:

- 1-That the chaplains confer with the staff for discussion of school problems.
- 2-That when a chaplain desires to take a child for interview from a cottage, he should definitely arrange with the cottage master or matron so that he or she will know the whereabouts of the child.

SUMMARY

In summing up, we wish to repeat that we believe Weeks School is being run for the best interests of the children. Special emphasis has been placed on the

rehabilitative feature and one of the most striking facts that satisfactory results are being obtained is born out by the figures of the numbers of boys and girls who have been rehabilitated and returned to society. In the twenty-two months ending October 31, 1946, 188 boys and girls were put out on placement.

We have been very fortunate in having Mr. James C. Foster and Mr. William Flanders as superintendent and assistant superintendent and director of education. These two men are both exceptionally well adapted to the work of administering Weeks School both by character and previous training.

Respectfully submitted,

STATE BOARD OF PUBLIC WELFARE

Olin D. Gay, Chairman

A. R. Gifford

Charles P. McDevitt